

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (original) A method for expanding the functionality of a content receiver comprising the steps of:

receiving a command from a downstream content receiver; and
executing the command if the command is not directed to a server further upstream.

2. (original) The method of Claim 1 further comprising the step of directing an unexecuted command to a server further upstream.

3. (original) The method of Claim 2 wherein the step of directing an unexecuted is command to a server further upstream comprises the steps of:

receiving data packets addressed to an upstream augmentation unit;
generating a modulated carrier signal according to the data packets; and
conveying the modulated carrier signal to an upstream interface.

4. (original) The method of Claim 1 further comprising the step of configuring a downstream content receiver to forward user commands upstream if the downstream content receiver had not been previously configured to do so.

5. (original) The method of Claim 4 wherein the step of configuring a downstream content receiver comprises the steps of:

installing a firmware patch into the downstream content receiver that minimally causes a processor in the downstream content receiver to:

fragment an unexecuted command into one or more data 30 packets;
generate a modulated carrier signal according to the data packets; and
convey the modulated carrier signal an upstream augmentation unit.

6. (original) The method of Claim 1 wherein the step of receiving a command from a downstream content receiver comprises the steps of:

receiving a data packet from a downstream interface according to a delivery address;
associating the data packet with a network message; and
directing a network message to a command parser that executes a command contained in the network message.

7. (original) The method of Claim 6 wherein the step of receiving a data packet from a is downstream interface comprises the steps of:

receiving a modulated carrier signal;
extracting a digital bit stream from the modulated carrier; an
framing the bit stream into data packets.

8. (original) The method of Claim 1 wherein the command received is ac record command and the step of executing the command comprises the steps of:

receiving a content steam from an upstream signal source; and
recording the content stream.

9. (original) The method of Claim 1 wherein the command received is a play command and the step of executing the command comprises the steps of:

determining what content is requested for play;
retrieving the requested content; and
directing the retrieved content to the downstream content receiver.

10. (original) The method of Claim 9 wherein the step of directing the retrieved content to the downstream content receiver comprises the steps of:

modulating a carrier signal according to the content stream;
combining the modulated carrier signal with a multiple carrier signal; and
conveying the combined signal to the downstream content receiver.

11. (original) The method of Claim 9 wherein the step of directing the retrieved content to the downstream content receiver comprises the steps of:

modulating a carrier signal according to the content stream; and
conveying the modulated carrier signal to the downstream content receiver in lieu of a multiple carrier signal.

12. (original) A content receiver augmentation unit comprising:
downstream interface; and
command executive that receives a command from the downstream interface and executes the command if the command is not directed to a server further upstream.

13. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of Claim 12 further comprises an upstream interface and wherein the command executive comprises a command forwarding unit that directs unexecuted commands to the upstream interface.

14. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of Claim 13 wherein the command forwarding unit receives data packets addressed to an upstream augmentation unit and directs these to the upstream interface and wherein the upstream interface comprises:
modulator that generates a modulated carrier signal according to the data packets; and
multiplexing filter capable of directing the modulated carrier into an upstream path.

15. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of Claim 12 further comprising a content receiver initiation unit that configures a downstream content receiver to forward commands if the downstream content receiver has not been previously configured to do so.

16. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of Claim 15 wherein the content receiver initiation unit configures a downstream content receiver by:
installing a firmware patch into the content receiver that minimally causes a processor in the content receiver to:
fragment an unexecuted command into one or more data packets;
generate a modulated carrier signal according to the data packets; and
convey the modulated carrier signal to an upstream augmentation unit.

17. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of Claim 13 wherein the downstream interface comprises:

data packet receiver that receives data packets according to a delivery address; and
message assembly unit that assembles one or more received data packets into a network message and wherein the command executive comprises a command parser that receives the network message and executes a command contained therein.

18. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of Claim 17 wherein the data packet receiver comprises:

demodulator that generates a digital bit stream according to a modulated carrier; and
data packet framer that generates data according to the digital bit stream.

19. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of Claim 12 further comprising a content storage unit and wherein the upstream interface comprises a content receiver that is capable of receiving a content stream from an upstream source and directs said content stream to the content storage unit if the command executive receives a record command.

20. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of Claim 12 further comprising a content storage unit wherein the command executive directs the content storage unit to direct a content stream to the downstream interface according to a received command if said received command is a play command.

21. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of Claim 20 wherein the downstream interface comprises:

modulator that generates a modulated signal according to a content stream; and
signal combiner capable of combining the modulated signal with a multiple carrier signal.

22. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of Claim 20 wherein the downstream interface comprises:

modulator that generates a modulated signal according to a content stream; and
signal selector capable of selecting the modulated signal in lieu of a multiple carrier signal.

23. (new) A system for enhancing the functionality of a cable programming content receiver by interfacing the content receiver with another device, the system comprising:

a content receiver configured to receive a content signal and to output associated content for presentation to a user;

an augmentation unit configured to receive said content signal from a content source and to provide said content signal to said content receiver; and

a communication link configured to connect said augmentation unit with said content receiver, said communication link being configured to carry downstream signals from said augmentation unit to said content receiver and upstream signals from said content receiver to said augmentation unit;

wherein said content receiver is configured to:

receive a command initiated by the user;

recognize said command as being directed to said augmentation unit; and

transmit said command to said augmentation unit;

wherein said augmentation unit is configured to identify and execute said command.

24. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said augmentation unit includes at least one function that is not included in said content receiver, and said command comprises a control command for initiating execution of said at least one function.

25. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said at least one function comprises at least one digital video recording function.

26. (new) The system of claim 25, wherein said command comprises a play command or a record command.

27. (new) The system of claim 26, wherein said augmentation unit is configured to execute said record command by recording said content signal, said content signal being identified by said command.

28. (new) The system of claim 26, wherein said augmentation unit is configured to execute said play command by transmitting said content signal to said content receiver, said content signal being identified by said command.

29. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said augmentation unit is configured to:

block a transmission sent by the content source and intended for said content receiver from being transmitted over said communication link; and

transmit said content signal to said content receiver over said communication link.

30. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said augmentation unit is configured to transmit said content signal to said content receiver over said communication link using a pre-designated channel.

31. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said augmentation unit is configured to identify an available downstream channel on said communication link and to transmit said content signal to said content receiver over said available downstream channel.

32. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said augmentation unit is configured to transmit said content signal to said content receiver over said communication link as either a QAM signal or an analog signal.

33. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said content receiver is configured to transmit said command to said augmentation unit over a pre-designated frequency.

34. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said communication link comprises a Radio Frequency (RF) cable, and said content receiver is configured to transmit said command to said augmentation unit over said RF cable.

35. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said communication link supports base-band communication between said augmentation device and said content receiver.

36. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said content receiver is configured to transmit said command to said augmentation unit as a QPSK signal.

37. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said augmentation unit is configured to identify said command by either a pre-designated transmission frequency or a data packet identification associated with said command.

38. (new) The system of claim 23, wherein said content receiver comprises a cable-ready device, and said augmentation device includes at least one of digital video recording capabilities or Internet capabilities.

39. (new) A method of enhancing the functionality of a cable programming content receiver by interfacing the content receiver with another device, the method comprising:

providing an augmentation device configured to receive a content signal from a content source and to transmit the content signal to the content receiver;

providing a communication link between the augmentation device and the content receiver; and

configuring the content receiver with instructions for interfacing with the augmentation device over the communication link, the instructions being configured to cause the content receiver to:

recognize a command received from a user of the content receiver as being directed to the augmentation unit; and

transmit the command to the augmentation unit;

the augmentation device being configured to identify and execute the command received from the content receiver and intended for the augmentation device.

40. (new) The method of claim 39, wherein said step of configuring the content receiver includes downloading the instructions to the content receiver.

41. (new) The method of claim 40, wherein the instructions are in the form of a firmware patch.

42. (new) The method of claim 39, further comprising the augmentation unit: receiving the command from the content receiver; and

executing a function in response to receiving the command from the content receiver.

43. (new) The method of claim 42, wherein the command comprises a record command, and wherein said step executing includes recording the content signal in response to recognizing the record command, the content signal being identified by the command.

44. (new) The method of claim 42, wherein the command comprises a play command, and wherein said step of executing includes transmitting the content signal from the augmentation unit to the content receiver in response to recognizing the play command, the content signal being identified by the command.

45. (new) The method of claim 39, wherein the command is transmitted to the augmentation unit over a pre-designated frequency.

46. (new) The method of claim 39, wherein the command is transmitted to the augmentation unit as a QPSK signal.

47. (new) The method of claim 39, wherein the command is identified by the augmentation unit based on either a pre-designated transmission frequency or a data packet identification associated with the command.

48. (new) The method of claim 39, further comprising the augmentation unit receiving the command from the content receiver and transmitting the content signal to the content receiver in response to the command, the command identifying the content signal.

49. (new) The method of claim 48, further comprising blocking a transmission sent by the content source and intended for the content receiver while transmitting the content signal to the content receiver.

50. (new) The method of claim 48, wherein the transmitting of the content signal to the content receiver includes transmitting the content signal on a pre-designated channel of the communication link.

51. (new) The method of claim 48, wherein the transmitting of the content signal to the content receiver includes:

identifying an available downstream channel of the communication link; and

transmitting the content signal to the content receiver over the available downstream channel.